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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on an important aspect of second language acquisition, namely, the complex set of modifications in the rules governing the forms and functions of the new language that are required by specific sociocultural contexts. These adjustments in language, or shifts in register, play a crucial role in interpreting utterances for social meaning, and are a major component of communicative competence, defined here as sociolinguistic competence. Specifically, this paper examines the shifts in register that occur in the development of interlanguages by second language learners, analyzing a set of syntactic-semantic modifications in language use, and contrasting student/teacher with student/student discourse. Special attention is given to the following questions: at what point in second language acquisition does the learner demonstrate sensitivity to the sociocultural rules that govern the teacher's language? Is the learner more sensitive to the norms emerging from student/teacher relationship or to those in student/student discourse? And finally, what speech acts conform to teacher's language norms earlier than others? (MES)

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"FITTING IN": REGISTER SHIFTING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

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In the process of second language acquisition not only must the learner develop rules governing the forms and functions of the new language, but, crucially, must also acquire the complex set of modifications in these rules required by specific social contexts. The acquisition of sets of rule variations, language registers, is essential if the second language user is to engage in socially acceptable discourse interactions with native speakers. It is, as Corder (1981) points out, part of the communicative competence of adult speakers of a language that they can accommodate their way of using the language to their interlocutors in a socially sanctioned manner. This accommodated rhetoric is generally referred to as register. The systematic register variation by members of a speech community reflects complex sets of interactions in the setting, social situation, topic, addressee, and status relationships between interlocutors. More specifically, accomodations in language use identified as register-related belong to that component of communicative competence which Canale and Swain (1980) identify as sociolinguistic competence. The sociocultural rules of use of this component specify the ways in which utterances are appropriate within a given sociocultural context when contextual factors such as topic, role of participants, setting, and norms of interaction are taken into account. These rules further specify the appropriate grammatical forms for a given sociocultural context. Within the sociolinguistic component of language, sociocultural rules of use interact with rules of discourse, which play a crucial role in interpreting utterances for social meaning.

Although the acquisition of the rules and mechanisms which govern appropriate use of language is one of the central tasks of second language learners, relatively few researchers in second language acquisition have focused on this area of sociolinguistic competence. Among recent research studies in sociolinguistic variation for second language users are those investigating the acquisition of specific speech acts. Included here are the studies by Fraser, Rintell, and Walters (1980) on making requests, Carrell and Konneker (1981), Scarcella (1979) and Walters (1979) on politeness strategies, and Fraser (1981) on insulting behavior. These studies in pragmatic competence consider a range of factors governing use of a second language effectively in a social setting. They develop from basic assumptions about language variation expressed in Hymes' (1967) statement that no normal person or community is limited in repertoire to a single variety of code which would preclude the possibility of shifting from one code variety, or register, to another. Gumperz (1967) goes even further when he notes that the same social pressures which direct a monolingual to change styles may lead a bilingual to shift from one language code to another. Code shifting and register shifting are viewed here as part of the same underlying unitary psychological processes. If this is the case, such register shifting processes should be observable in the interlanguage developmental processes of second language learners. In turn, such sociolinguistic variation, when acquired, permits second language users to establish closer identification with the target language sociocultural group whose language they are acquiring.

An aspect of sociolinguistic variation identified by Beebe (1980) is that of style shifting in interlanguage phonology in which transfer from L1 of a socially

appropriate variant under certain conditions is apparent. Beebe's data support the position articulated by Adjemian (1976) and Tarone (1979) that an interlanguage is, like the first language, a natural language and is, consequently, by definition, variable. Beebe's work and that of others support Labov's (1972) axiom that every speaker shifts linguistic variables as the social situation and topic change. For adult first language users, there are no single-style speakers. Beebe's empirical evidence supports the generalization that style shifting occurs in all natural languages, including interlanguages. As Littlewood (1981) observes, L2 users are accustomed to monitoring their L1 performance in order to achieve social appropriateness. The same mechanisms which govern the stylistic shifts in L1 are activated in L2 once the learner recognizes social norms. In so doing the learner strives towards forms which are perceived as more appropriate to the specific sociocultural context in which the learner finds himself. This striving towards a TL norm pulls the learner's whole interlanguage repertoire, or, in this case, sociolinguistic competence, towards the range of variation characteristic of the native speaker's use of the language. This leads, then, to the gradual acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in L2, an aspect of second language acquisition little researched.

Among register shifts required in using language appropriately are those governing status relationships between the two interlocutors. In the school setting this is most clearly demonstrated in the unequal status relationships between teachers and students and in those of equality in student/student relationships. How and when, in terms of sociolinguistic competence, these social contrasts develop are research issues. The purpose of this paper, then,

is to examine the acquisition of a set of syntactic-semantic modifications in language use appropriate for student/teacher interactions contrasted with student/student discourse in order to gain insight into aspects of register-shifting in interlanguage use. Specific attention is given to the following questions:

(1) At what point in SLA does the second language learner demonstrate sensitivity to TL norms governed by sociocultural rules of language use?

(2) Is the L2 user more sensitive to TL norms governing unequal status relationships in student/teacher interactions than to those in the less formal equal status relationships of student/student discourse?

(3) What speech acts may conform to TL norms earlier than others? How do these interact with status relationships?

Responses to these questions necessitate examination of target language (TL) baseline data. As Carrell and Konneker (1981,29) observe, "future advances in understanding pragmatic aspects of second language learning will come about only as research relates second language data to first language pragmatic theory and first language baseline data, and the relationship between them."

METHOD

Utilizing aspects of contextual analysis developed by Celce-Murcia (1980), the study of register shifting in a second language focuses on the identification of a set of forms, each with potential meaning and function for student/teacher and/or student/student discourse interactions. The specific variable is the social situation in which the form holds expected use, that of student interacting with teacher or that of student interacting with another student. The social situation, consequently, reflects either formal or semiformal dimensions of register, indicative of student/teacher interaction, or informal, casual register, signalling

student, student interaction. The use of written, elicited data is, among others, one of the possible features of contextual analysis. After data collection, consideration of the social context is utilized in determining why the particular form is used or why one form is used rather than another standing in contrast with it. Features of contextual analysis permit study of the interaction of forms with specific social contexts such as those which consider the status relationships of interlocutors. This type of analysis can give indications of the extent of register shifting for L2 users.

To elicit status relationship responses, either student/teacher or student/student, a questionnaire was devised to elicit responses for register identification/response acceptability on a range of form/function relationships. In addition to collecting information from each L2 learner on age, grade, sex, birthplace, L1, and the length of stay in the United States, the questionnaire contained 14 linguistic forms that might be used in an English-speaking U.S. high school environment. The 14 forms were divided among the following functions: greetings (3), requests (3), compliments (2), small talk (3), closings or leave-takings (3). Respondents were asked to react to each form, which might open a conversation or take place with a conversation, as ones which might be heard in the school environment. By checking labels headed <u>adult</u>, <u>student</u>, or <u>both</u>, participants indicated their position on appropriate use for each form. Directions for the questionnaire clearly stated that there was no right answer. The opinions of the respondents were the determining factors.

In order not to confound attitudes towards appropriateness with reading ability, the vocabulary and structures were kept as simple as possible. To

provide control on possible variations in meaning associated with the written statements, the individual utterances on the questionnaire were tape-recorded along with directions for completing the questionnaire. Respondents listened to the taped version as they completed the form.

SUBJECTS

Subjects for the study were students in a senior high school located in a low socio-economic area of San Antonio, Texas. It is a transition neighborhood which includes large populations of both monolingual English speakers and bilingual Spanish-English speakers. The participants in the study included 24 monolingual speakers of English in an intact grade 12 English class, 7 students bilingual in Spanish and English, in the same class, 14 students in an ESL class.

The response of the 24 monolinguals in a senior English class gave the baseline data against which contrasts could be made for students whose first language was Spanish and English the second language. The 7 bilingual students who were in the same class with the monolingual English speakers had entered the schooling process in the primary grades as monolingual Spanish speakers and had acquired English during the school years. By grade 12 they were considered to have proficiency in English equivalent to their monolingual peers. They continued to maintain use of Spanish in the home and community.

Contrasted with the bilingual students were those students in the process of acquiring English as their second language and, consequently, enrolled in an ESL class in the same high school as the other participants in the study. All were Spanish L1 speakers and had moved to Texas from Mexico at some time during the schooling process. Within the class of 14 students, 9 had achieved an advanced

proficiency level. The remaining were at beginning or intermediate stages of proficiency. Of this group of 5, only 2 students were adequately proficient in English to participate in the study. The 3 beginning-level students were eliminated from the study. The remaining 2 students comprise an intermediate ESL level.

DATA ANALYSIS

The 14 linguistic forms to which participants in the study were asked to give responses in terms of appropriateness for student/teacher, student/student, or either interaction represent 5 form-function relationships: (1) greetings - Hi, what's up?, Hello, how are you?, Hey man, what's happening?; (2) requests - Close the door, Please close the door, Close it.; (3) compliments - Gee! That's a pretty blouse (shirt), That's a sharp looking pair of slacks you're wearing; (4) small talk - Where'd you get that UGLY sweater?, You look like you've been run over by a truck!, You sure don't look well today; (5) closings (leave-taking) - So long, see you tomorrow, Good-bye, Take it easy. The specific utterances were selected from those typically heard among students enrolled in the high school from which participants in the study were selected.

After checking their response, students were also asked to write in an appropriate rejoinder developing an adjacency pair (Richards, 1980). This gave verification to their understanding of the register the utterance represented.

Table 1 summarizes register identification for the 14 utterances by the monolingual English-speaking students, bilinguals, and advanced ESL students. Responses are given in percent of those in each group who indicated the utterance would be an appropriate member of an adjacency pair for student/teacher, student/

student, or either type of interaction (undifferentiated).

TABLE 1

REGISTER IDENTIFICATION FOR DISCOURSE CONTEXTS

Student/Teacher (S/T), Student/Student (S/S), Undifferentiated (UND)

FUNCTION: GREETINGS

FORM: (1) Hi! What's up?

S/T: 0% all groups
S/S: 66% monolinguals, 43% bilinguals, 66% ESL
UND: 34% monolinguals, 57% bilinguals, 34% ESL

(2) Hello, How are you?

S/T: 52% monolinguals, 71% bilinguals, 55% ESL
S/S: 0% all groups
UND: 48% monolinguals, 29% bilinguals, 45% ESL

(3) Hey man, what's happenin'?

S/T: 4% monolinguals, 0% bilinguals, 22% ESL
S/S: 89% monolinguals, 100% bilinguals, ESL
UND: 7% monolinguals, 0% bilinguals, ESL

FUNCTION: REQUESTS

FORM: (4) Close the door.

S/T: 4% monolinguals, 0% bilinguals, 22% ESL
S/S: 7% monolinguals, 57% bilinguals, 33% ESL
UND: 89% monolinguals, 43% bilinguals, 45% ESL

(5) Please, close the door.

S/T: 41% monolinguals, 86% bilinguals, 45% ESL
S/S: 0% all groups
UND: 59% monolinguals, 14% bilinguals, 55% ESL

(6) Close it.

S/T: 22% monolingual, 14% bilingual, 0% ESL
S/S: 11% monolingual, 43% bilingual, 33% ESL
UND: 66% monolingual, 43% bilingual, 66% ESL

FUNCTION: COMPLEMENTS

FORM: (7) Gee! That's a pretty blouse (shirt).

S/T: 0% monolingual, 14% bilingual, 33% ESL
S/S: 37% monolingual, 14% bilingual, 45% ESL
UND: 48% monolingual, 43% bilingual, 22% ESL

(8) That's a sharp looking pair of slacks you're wearing.

S/T: 15% monolinguals, 43% bilinguals, 33% ESL
S/S: 37% monolinguals, 14% bilinguals, 45% ESL
UND: 48% monolinguals, 43% bilinguals, 22% ESL

FUNCTION: SMALL TALK

FORM: (9) Where'd you get that UGLY sweater?

S/T: 4% monolingual, 0% bilingual, ESL
S/S: 78% monolingual, 100% bilingual, 89% ESL
UND: 18% monolingual, 0% bilingual, 11% ESL

(10) You look like you've been run over by a truck!

S/T: 0% monolinguals, bilinguals, 33% ESL
S/S: 85% monolinguals, 71% bilinguals, 33% ESL
UND: 15% monolinguals, 29% bilinguals, 33% ESL

(11) You sure don't look well today.

S/T: 37% monolinguals, 43% bilinguals, 44% ESL
S/S: 0% monolinguals, bilinguals; 12% ESL
UND: 63% monolinguals, 57% bilinguals, 44% ESL

FUNCTION: CLOSINGS (LEAVE-TAKING)

(12) So long, see you tomorrow.

S/T: 4% monolinguals, 14% bilinguals, 0% ESL
S/S: 37% monolinguals, 14% bilinguals, 45% ESL
UND: 59% monolinguals, 72% bilinguals, 55% ESL

(13) Good-bye.

S/T: 22% monolinguals, 29% bilinguals, 3[illegible]% ESL
S/S: 0% monolinguals, bilinguals; 12% ESL
UND: 74% monolinguals, 71% bilinguals, 55% ESL

(14) Take it easy.

S/T: 0% monolinguals, bilinguals; 11% ESL
S/S: 63% monolinguals, 57% bilinguals, 45% ESL
UND: 37% monolinguals, 43% bilinguals, 33% ESL

Illustrative of the type of responses ESL students gave for the various form/function relationships investigated were the following:

(1) Greetings: Hi! What's up?
Response: How you doin'?

(2) Requests: Please, close the door.
Response: OK.

(3) Compliment: Gee! That's a pretty blouse.
Response: Thank you.

(4) Small talk: You sure don't look well today.
Response: *So do you.

(5) Closings (Leave-takings): So long, see you tomorrow.
Response: OK.

Findings from this analysis of both bilingual second language speakers of English and students in the process of acquiring English as their second language raise questions regarding the findings of Walters (1979) that native and non-native speakers of English show a very high correlation in their perception of the politeness of request strategies. When attitudes towards sociolinguistic variations are examined in terms of appropriateness, taking into account status relationships between interlocutors, the pattern becomes less clear. Using the responses of monolingual English-speaking senior high school students as base-line data, the responses of both bilingual and ESL students indicate divergence on all functions investigated, with the status relationship between student and

addressee a critical variable. It must, of course, be taken into account that the baseline data from native English speakers represent a variety of English functioning in a low socio-economic area, representative of the type serving as input in language acquisition situations for both the bilingual and ESL students (Krashen, 1981).

In order to determine the degree to which the bilingual and ESL students differed from the monolingual norms for an identified peer group, the difference between the responses for monolinguals and bilinguals was calculated together with that for monolingual and ESL students. Differences are measured in terms of divergence from appropriate register identification as it was assigned in percent of responses by monolingual peers. The sum of the differences between the percent of responses for each form/function relationship given by the monolinguals and bilinguals and by the monolinguals and ESL students gives an index of divergence from monolingual norms as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

INDEX OF DIVERGENCE FROM MONOLINGUAL NORMS IN REGISTER IDENTIFICATION FOR BILINGUAL AND ESL STUDENTS

(Index given in difference in percents between groups)

	BILINGUALS (N=7)			ESL--ADVANCED (N = 7)			ESL--INTERMEDIATE (N = 2)		
	S/T	S/S	UND	S/T	S/S	UND	S/T	S/S	UND
Greetings	23	34	49	7	11	11	56	45	93
Requests	57	82	114	44	48	88	109	96	146
Compliments	41	49	19	51	34	32	65	39	24
Small Talk	10	36	38	40	75	54	41	213	180
Closings	17	29	22	26	27	38	26	76	98

For bilinguals and advanced ESL students the pattern emerges of closer approximation to monolingual peer norms on student/teacher interactions than on student/student interactions in most cases. The one exception is in the use of compliments by the advanced ESL group. Here they correspond more closely to monolingual peers on student/student interactions rather than student/teacher exchanges. The pattern is somewhat less clear on the use of undifferentiated forms although it suggests that there is least agreement for all groups with monolinguals in this category. For the intermediate ESL students the responses approximate least closely the monolinguals. Register identifications for student/teacher and student/student interactions are less systematic for these students than the other two groups of L2 speakers.

Table 3 gives the mean index of divergence for each of the five functions, the average of difference in percents from monolingual norms in all three categories: student/teacher, student/student, and undifferentiated registers.

TABLE 3

MEAN INDEX OF DIVERGENCE FROM MONOLINGUAL NORMS BY FUNCTION

GROUP FUNCTION	BILINGUALS (n=7)	ESL-ADVANCED (n=9)	ESL-INTERMEDIATE (n=2)
Greetings	35.3	9.6	64.6
Requests	84.3	60.0	117.0
Compliments	36.3	39.0	42.6
Small Talk	28.0	56.3	114.6
Closings	22.6	30.3	66.6

The pattern of relationships among the three groups in reference to monolingual register norms is given in Figure 1.

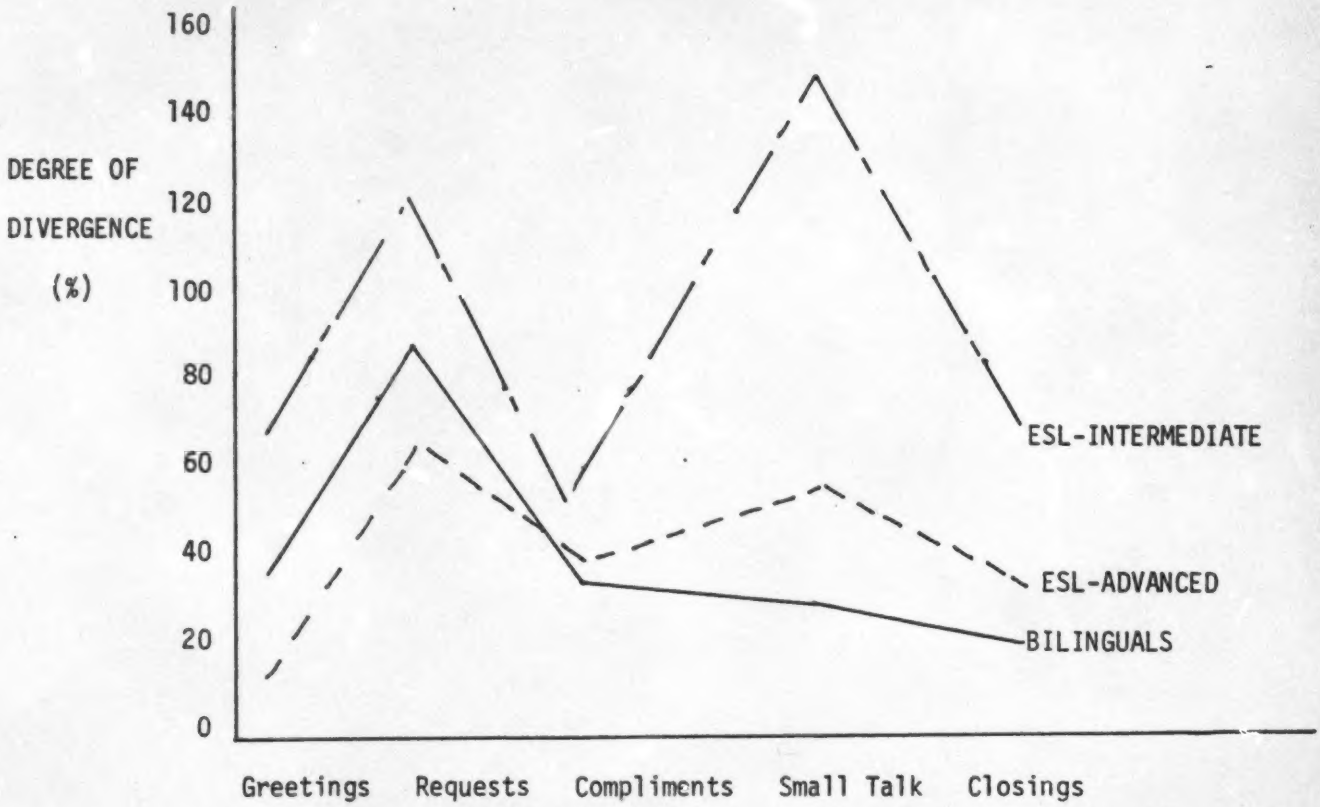

Figure 1. Comparisons of degrees of divergence in register identification patterns by language function for L2 speakers of English contrasted with L1 English norms.

For all functions the intermediate ESL students diverge most sharply from the pattern of register identification of both bilingual and advanced ESL students. Of the latter two groups, the bilinguals correspond most closely to monolingual peer norms for register shifting in terms of compliments, small talk, and closings or leave-taking. The ESL students correspond most closely to monolinguals on greetings and requests.

On the dimension of status relationships between interlocutors, Table 4 summarizes the mean index of divergence from monolingual norms. Means represent the average difference of all functions for each type of interaction: student/teacher, student/student, undifferentiated.

TABLE 4

MEAN INDEX OF DIVERGENCE FROM MONOLINGUAL NORMS
BY STATUS RELATIONSHIPS OF INTERLOCUTORS

GROUP / INTERLOCUTORS	BILINGUALS (n=7)	ESL-ADVANCED (n=9)	ESL-INTERMEDIATE (n=2)
Student/Teacher	29.6	34.4	59.4
Student/Student	46.0	41.2	93.8
Undifferentiated	48.4	42.4	108.2

The overall pattern for ESL advanced students indicates that this group diverges slightly less from monolingual norms than their bilingual peers in student/student and undifferentiated register varieties. The bilinguals have somewhat closer correspondence to monolingual peers on student/teacher varieties. Figure 2 displays this relationship.

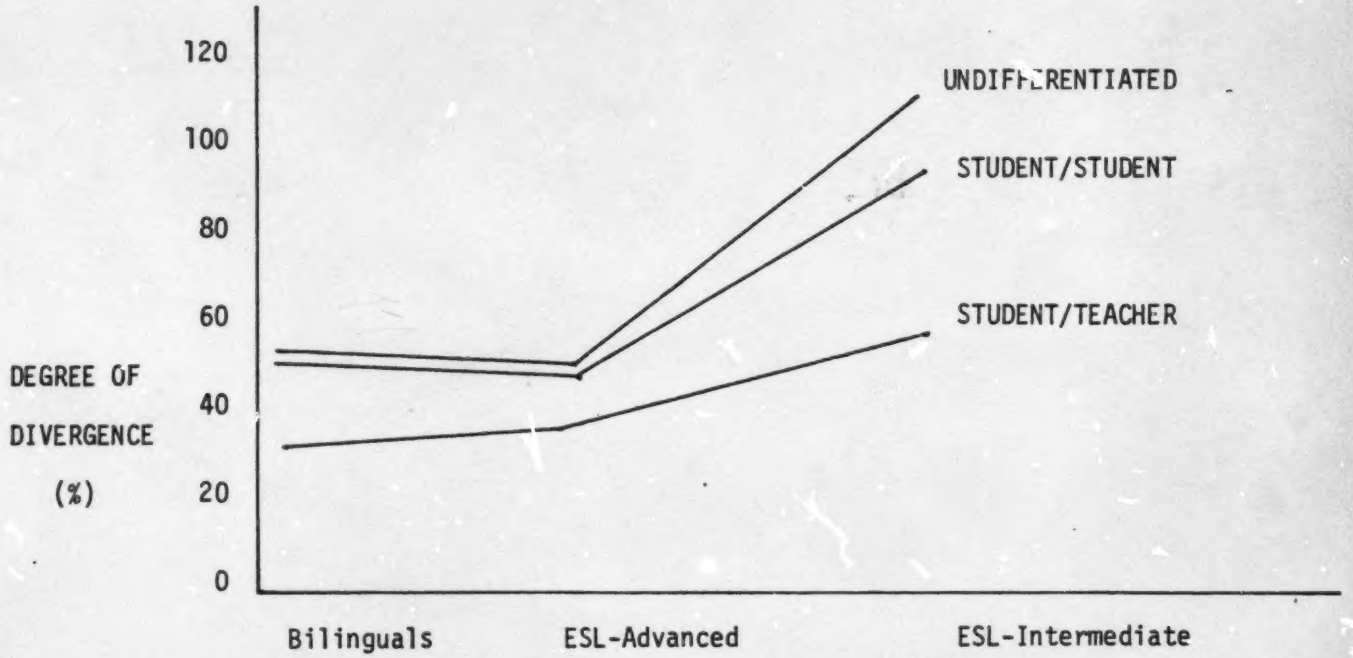

Figure 2. Comparison of degrees of divergence in register identification patterns by status relationship varieties for L2 speakers of English contrasted with L1 English norms.

All three groups show greater convergence with the register characteristic of student/teacher interactions as determined from the use of English by monolingual English-speaking peers. Least convergence occurs in those form/function relationships which monolinguals identify as undifferentiated, ones they designate as appropriate for both student/teacher and student/student interactions. Student/student varieties are less convergent with monolingual norms than student/teacher variations but more so than those appropriate for both status types of interactions. Furthermore, advanced ESL learners show somewhat closer adherence to

monolingual English norms in student/student and undifferentiated interactions than either the bilinguals or the intermediate ESL learners.

DISCUSSION

This study has focused on the acquisition of the ability of second language learners of English to use L2 in a social context typically found in the school setting for performing various speech acts of opening and closing conversations, making requests, giving compliments or making small talk. Although every language utilizes the same basic set of speech acts and set of strategies for performing a given speech act, the second language learner is faced with the task of learning to code in L2 what he already knows in L1. This takes time and accounts, in part, for some of the differences observed in ESL intermediate, ESL advanced, and bilingual students. Beyond the task of coding in terms of grammatical competence, however, the L2 learner is faced with the complex sets of interactions of form/function relationships with appropriate register variants. Acquisition of grammatical competence is not, it appears, in a one-to-one relationship with the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence.

Because of the limited number of subjects for this study, findings necessarily must be taken tentatively. However, results are suggestive of a number of important variables, to be considered in the development of sociocultural rules of L2 use. Critical variables for the ESL students were degree of English proficiency and length of time in the United States. The advanced ESL students approximated TL norms of their peers much more fully than intermediate ESL students.

Of particular interest, however, is the relationship between advanced ESL

students and bilingual peers. On the mean index of divergence from monolingual norms by function, the ESL students approximated the monolingual TL norms more closely for both greetings and requests. On indicators of compliments, small talk, and closings the bilinguals corresponded more closely. From these findings, at least, it is not clear when, or if, the second language learner will demonstrate the full range of sensitivity to TL norms for appropriate use of language. This suggests, further, that sociocultural norms other than those identified for distinguishing unequal student/teacher and equal student/student relationships are also operative and intersect with the lingusitic variants studied here.

Data from this pilot study suggests that L2 users are more sensitive to TL norms governing unequal status relationships, student/teacher, than to those in the less formal equal student/student status relationships when the general pattern is examined. This sensitivity is an aspect of L1 use that L2 learners undoubtedly bring to the second language situation. Of particular interest, however, is the degree of divergence from monolingual TL norms exhibited by the grade 12 bilinguals, all of whom had been in the same school setting as the monolingual students for the same length of time. Results here may be reflecting a variety of English functioning in the bilingual community in which certain sociocultural rules of language use are not shared with monolingual peers though there is high congruence in other aspects of communicative competence.

Findings from this study permit no clear generalizations with regard to which specific speech acts may conform to TL norms earlier than others. Advanced ESL students approached TL norms more closely than intermediate ESL students on

all form/function relationships. This group also corresponded more closely to monolingual norms than the bilinguals on register identifications for greetings and requests. On giving compliments, making small talk, and closing conversations, the bilinguals were closer to TL norms than the ESL students. Although the lack of any clear-cut pattern may be an artifact of the questionnaire used in gathering the data, it may also reflect types of emphasis given in the ESL program of instruction not available to the bilinguals. Or it may also indicate aspects of the permeability of the interlanguage by the target language at various points in the developmental continuum. All of these issues remain areas of further investigation.

Register shifting in a second language is a complex process which draws on a set of intricate relationships. This study has attempted to isolate several critical variables, form/function relationships and status relationships in discourse exchanges, in order to identify aspects of register shifting in the process of acquiring a second language. Data from this study illustrate the gradual acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in L2, but, in turn, raise critical questions in regard to relationships between second language proficiency and the point at which rules of sociolinguistic variation are acquired.

IMPLICATIONS

Even though the ESL program did not give formal instruction in specific aspects of register variation, students residing longer in the United States with greater proficiency in both oral and written language had acquired many of the distinctions observed by native English-speaking peers. ESL students conformed fairly closely in register use to bilingual peers. Those in the United States

less than three years deviated markedly. Of critical importance, however, is that no group of L2 speakers of English corresponded to monolingual English-speaking peers, even after many years of schooling in English, the second language. These facts call for close attention by educators responsible for the second language education of their students. In the school setting, observation of the rules for register shifting plays a crucial role in the social integration of second language speakers of English into sociocultural dynamics of the school setting. Failure to observe sociolinguistic norms for student/teacher and student/student interactions may lead to serious negative consequences both from an instructional and a social viewpoint for L2 speakers of English. Implications of the findings of this pilot study in L2 register shifting suggest that while ESL students appear to acquire aspects of sociolinguistic competence over time, the process may be facilitated by more carefully designed instructional programs that include the dimension of sociocultural rules of language use in second language development. In any case, it is crucial to consider baseline data from the monolingual TL peers with whom the second language speakers are expected to interact in the school community. The acquisition of pragmatic knowledge—of register shifting—must be considered in any attempts to understand what it means to acquire in full measure a second language.

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